WE CLAIM:

1. A suturing instrument comprising:

an elongate body member having a longitudinal axis;

a suture deployment system located within a distal end portion of said elongate body member wherein said distal end portion includes a suture exit port, said suture deployment system comprising:

a curved suture carrier channel; and

a curved suture carrier movably positioned in said curved suture carrier channel;

and

a deployment controller having a proximal end, a distal end, a retracted position and a deployed position, said deployment controller extending substantially along the longitudinal axis of said elongate body member to the distal end of said elongate body member where it is coupled to said curved suture carrier and moves said curved suture carrier through said curved suture carrier channel as it moves between said retracted position and said deployed position, said curved suture carrier channel configured within said distal end portion of said elongate body member such that said curved suture carrier exits said suture exit port and is guided along a path which includes a proximal curved path segment such that a surface of said curved suture carrier is substantially adjacent with an outer surface of said distal end portion of said elongate body member along said proximal curved path segment.

2. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 1 further comprising a suture catch positioned proximate to said distal end portion of said elongate body member such that a distal path segment of said curved suture carrier path is intercepted by said suture catch as said deployment controller approaches said deployed position.

3. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 1 further comprising a surgical needle positioned in a distal end of said curved suture carrier.

4. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 3 wherein said surgical needle further comprises a bullet needle.

5. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 1 wherein:

said curved suture carrier channel and said curved suture carrier are located in a distal tip assembly of said elongate body member; and

said distal tip assembly is joined with said elongate body member such that said distal tip assembly is free to rotate axially about said elongate body member longitudinal axis.

6. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 1 wherein said deployment controller is coupled to said curved suture carrier with a flexible driver member.

7. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 6 wherein said flexible driver member further comprises an alloy of nickel and titanium.

8. A suturing instrument comprising:

a body member;

a suture exit port formed in said body member;

a curved suture carrier channel formed in said body member; and

a curved suture carrier movably positioned in said curved suture carrier channel, wherein said curved suture carrier has a retracted position such that said curved suture carrier is positioned within an interior region of said body member and a deployed position such that a portion of said curved suture carrier is positioned exterior to said body member, said curved suture carrier configured within said curved suture carrier channel such

that said curved suture carrier exits said interior region of said body member through said suture exit port and is guided along a path which includes a proximal curved path segment wherein a surface of said curved suture carrier is substantially adjacent with an outer surface of said body member along said proximal curved path segment.

9. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 8 further comprising a suture catch positioned on said body member such that a distal path segment of said curved suture carrier path is intercepted by said suture catch.

10. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 8 further comprising a surgical needle positioned in a distal end of said curved suture carrier.

11. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 10 wherein said surgical needle further comprises a bullet needle.

12. A suturing instrument comprising:

an elongate body member having a longitudinal axis;

a distal tip suture deployment assembly joined with a distal end of said elongate body member such that said distal tip assembly is free to rotate axially about said elongate body member longitudinal axis, said distal tip suture deployment assembly comprising:

a distal tip body member;

a suture exit port formed in said distal tip body member;

a curved suture carrier channel formed in said distal tip body member; and

a curved suture carrier movably positioned in said curved suture carrier channel; and

a deployment controller having a proximal end, a distal end, a retracted position and a deployed position, said deployment controller extending substantially along

the longitudinal axis of said elongate body member to the distal end of said elongate body member where it is coupled to said distal tip suture deployment assembly and moves said curved suture carrier through said curved suture carrier channel as it moves between said retracted position and said deployed position.

13. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 12 wherein said distal tip suture deployment assembly is configured to have a retracted position such that said curved suture carrier is positioned within an interior region of said distal tip body member and a deployed position where a portion of said curved suture carrier is positioned exterior to said distal tip body member, said curved suture carrier configured within said curved suture carrier channel such that said curved suture carrier exits said interior region of said distal tip body member through said suture exit port and is guided along a path which includes a proximal curved path segment wherein a surface of said curved suture carrier is substantially adjacent with an outer surface of said distal tip body member along said proximal curved path segment.

14. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 12 further comprising a suture catch positioned on said distal tip body member such that a distal path segment of said curved suture carrier path is intercepted by said suture catch as said deployment controller approaches said deployed position.

15. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 13 further comprising a suture catch positioned on said distal tip body member such that a distal path segment of said curved suture carrier path is intercepted by said suture catch as said deployment controller approaches said deployed position.

16. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 12 further comprising a surgical needle positioned in said distal end of said curved suture carrier.

17. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 16 wherein said surgical needle further comprises a bullet needle.

18. A method for placing a suture in thin tissue adjacent bone structure comprising:

placing a suturing instrument which encloses a curved suture carrier which is movably positioned within a curved suture carrier channel adjacent the tissue to be sutured; and

deploying the curved suture carrier out of the suturing instrument through an exit port such that the curved suture carrier exits an interior region of said suturing instrument through said exit port along a path which approaches being substantially tangential to an outer surface of said suturing instrument surrounding said exit port.

19. A suturing instrument comprising:

a body member;

an exit port formed in said body member;

a curved suture carrier channel formed in said body member; and

a curved suture carrier movably positioned in said curved suture carrier channel, wherein said curved suture carrier has a retracted position such that said curved suture carrier is positioned within an interior region of said body member and a deployed position such that a portion of said curved suture carrier is positioned exterior to said body member, said curved suture carrier configured within said curved suture carrier channel such that said curved suture carrier exits said interior region of said body member through said exit port along a path which approaches being substantially tangential to an outer surface of said body member surrounding said exit port.

20. A suturing instrument comprising:

an elongate body member having a longitudinal axis;

a suture deployment system located within a distal end portion of said elongate body member wherein said distal end portion includes a suture exit port, said suture deployment system comprising:

a curved suture carrier channel; and

a curved suture carrier movably positioned in said curved suture carrier channel;

and

a deployment controller having a proximal end, a distal end, a retracted position and a deployed position, said deployment controller extending substantially along the longitudinal axis of said elongate body member to the distal end of said elongate body member where it is coupled to said curved suture carrier and moves said curved suture carrier through said curved suture carrier channel as it moves between said retracted position and said deployed position, said curved suture carrier channel configured within said distal end portion of said elongate body member such that said curved suture carrier exits said suture exit port along a path which approaches being substantially tangential to an outer surface of said body member surrounding said suture exit port.

21. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 20 further comprising a suture catch positioned proximate to said distal end portion of said elongate body member such that a distal path segment of said curved suture carrier path is intercepted by said suture catch as said deployment controller approaches said deployed position.

22. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 20 further comprising a surgical needle positioned in a distal end of said curved suture carrier.

23. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 22 wherein said surgical needle further comprises a bullet needle.

24. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 20 wherein:

said curved suture carrier channel and said curved suture carrier are located in a distal tip assembly of said elongate body member; and

said distal tip assembly is joined with said elongate body member such that said distal tip assembly is free to rotate axially about said elongate body member longitudinal axis.

25. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 20 wherein said deployment controller is coupled to said curved suture carrier with a flexible driver member.

26. A suturing instrument as defined in Claim 25 wherein said flexible driver member further comprises an alloy of nickel and titanium.